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ABSTRACT

This inventory was developed to serve as a working tool to help local education agencies review existing policies and practices that may negatively affect students' achievement and encourage their dropping out, especially in grades 7 through 12. The following areas are covered: (1) instruction; (2) discipline; (3) support services; (4) attendance; (5) student activities; and (6) school/community relations. This inventory enables the user to identify whether or not a policy or practice that is presently being employed at an institution is aggravating or alleviating a given problem, and what alternatives are available to reverse the effects of a dysfunctional policy. A student questionnaire, which can be used to help guide professional decisions regarding changes in policies and practices, is included. A list of 29 resources is also included. (JS)

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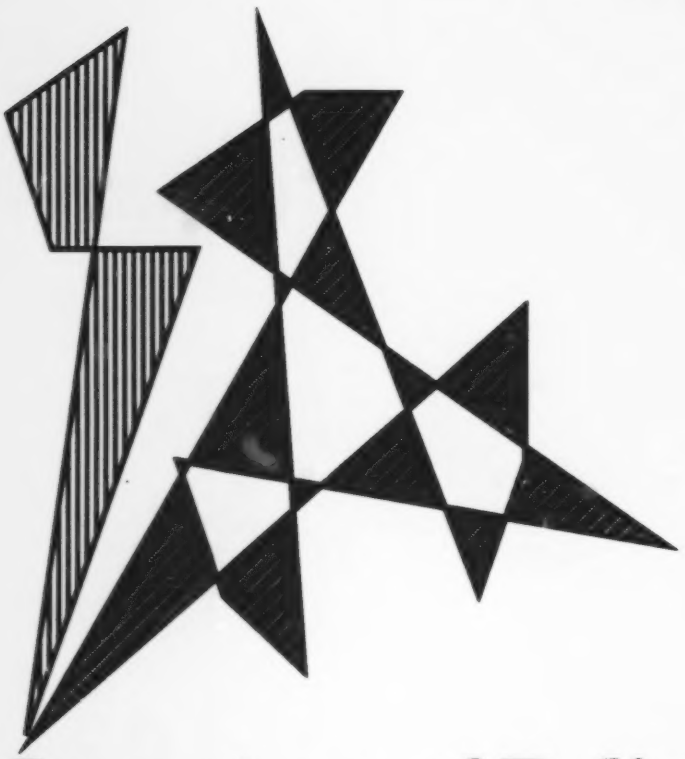

Inventory of Policies and Practices Related to Student Failure and Dropping Out

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Iowa Department of Education

1989

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Inventory of School Policies and Practices Related to Student Failure and Dropping Out

This inventory was developed to serve as a working tool to help local education agencies to review existing policies and practices in six different areas that may be negatively affecting student performance, especially in grades 7-12. The six areas are: instruction, discipline, support services, attendance, student activities, and school/community relations. The inventory represents a direct response to school research, publications, and dialogue on the need to develop more positive learning environments for all students.

The content of the inventory was developed under a grant from the Education Commission of the States allowing input from a thirteen member task force and 237 student dropouts enrolled in seven different alternative schools throughout Iowa. Time limitations naturally prevented an exhaustive review of all policies and practices and potential alternatives. Therefore, the content is considered a beginning base to work from and should be revised and modified to accommodate new information to best meet the needs of local practitioners.

The format of the inventory identifies a policy or practice, the potential negative effect on students, and possible alternatives to the policy or practice. It allows the user to identify whether or not the policy or practice is a perceived problem and what action should be taken locally.

Local administrators and school board members are encouraged to use this inventory to gain information to help design local plans for at-risk student services. Students, teachers, parents, business persons, community agencies, and other interested persons could be involved to help develop consensus on local problems and solutions to the problems. The questionnaire in this inventory, which was used to help develop it, serves as an example of how information could be collected from students at the local level. Other suggestions for use of the inventory include:

- Local boards of education could schedule time to review one section of the inventory at a time during regularly scheduled meetings. This process may be more productive than trying to do the entire inventory in one setting.

- Involve all professional staff in the process of responding to the inventory through scheduled staff development. Allow time for the staff to complete the entire inventory or one section at a time. Encourage staff to make recommendations, allow time for discussion of the recommendations, and establish group consensus for final decisions. Prioritize decisions and set goals that can be realistically accomplished given the time available.

- Develop a similar format, identifying local policies for each education level, and have students and other community persons analyze the policies with regard to negative effect on students and suggest potential alternatives to the policies.

- Revise the enclosed student questionnaire and use it with all students. Prioritize policies and practices by using the total number of student responses. Specifically work on the top ten or top five policies depending on local capability.

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Minimum course loads for all students.	Causes students who are not ready for full course loads to fail in one or more classes. Encourages truancy/ tardiness.	Allow reduced loads for students in special cases after conferences with parents/guardians.		
Teaching styles and learning styles of students not matched.	Establishes stressed relationships between students and teachers. Reduces student performance. Establishes an "I can't learn attitude." Causes discipline problems.	Provide collegial teaming to improve instruction. Allow time for matching teaching styles and learning styles. Schedule students based on teaching/learning styles. Allow students to change teachers, especially when failure exists and teacher/ student conflict restricts learning.		
Tracking Ability grouping	Characterizes some students as "losers." Locks students into ability groups, preventing movement into other ability groups. Creates feelings of inadequacy. Limits the perception of students about their potential ability and aspirations for future opportunities.	Group students flexibly, allowing mixed ability groups and dynamic, cooperative learning. Allow voluntary course selection with guidance.		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Promotion based on strict credit attainment to achieve grade level.	Causes students who do not reach strict attainment level to repeat entire grade. Establishes student doubts that they belong in school.	Promote students on the basis of partial credit attainments. Require students to repeat only deficient areas. Establish alternative promotion programs, allowing students to catch up to age peers by Saturday schools, before school/after school tutoring, etc.		
No more than two credits allowed to be earned by correspondence or equivalency programs from other institutions.	Limits options for completing a high school education. Discourages students from trying.	Allow unlimited transfer of credits as long as the credits are judged equivalent to local credits.		
K-12 retention.	Reduces self esteem. Causes permanent negative effect on performance.	Transfer students to a classroom with fewer students, more individual attention, and special resources. Provide competency-based curriculum in multi-grade groupings. Provide an early readiness program to overcome development lags. Practice no retention after first grade; individualize programs starting at grade 9 based on projected plans (academic, personal/ social, career/vocational) and parent/guardian input. Allow promotion with remediation in a given skill area, possibly in an alternative setting.		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Absence of transition programs for students experiencing a change of buildings and staff as they move from one level of education to another or as they move laterally.	Reduces student's sense of place or belonging.	Establish transition programs to assist students experiencing: a) a change of buildings and staff (elementary to junior high, junior high to senior high, senior high to post-secondary) b) restructuring of grades c) departmentalization d) transfer between school districts e) returning from long term illnesses or institutionalization		
Increased requirements for graduation. Increased ratio of mandatory classes to electives.	Increases chances of failure for those not academically inclined. Restricts student options in elective areas such as vocational education.	Allow mandatory requirements to be met through a network of electives, including vocational education. Allow articulation with other secondary and post-secondary institutions to satisfy graduation requirements.		
Expanding the number of classes that students must take in a given day. Scheduling all students to graduate from high school by the age of 17 or 18.	Increases student stress in trying to meet schedule demands. Increases chances of failure in one or more classes. Causes difficulties in meeting homework demands.	Expand options to meet the demand for increased requirements, such as expanded school year, Saturday school, extended graduation program to age 21, evening school. Provide students a choice to graduate by the age of 21.		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Defining the school day as 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. only.	Eliminates options for students who must work to satisfy basic needs.	Develop schedules to accommodate students' needs.		
Passive teaching practices such as lectures, monitoring seat work, and preparation for assignments.	Limits student achievement. Establishes and reinforces student passiveness. Negates students attaining and maintaining a sense of relevancy.	Increase the interaction between students and teachers and students and administrators by open discussions in classes, evaluative and opinion questioning, feedback on work performed, and more projects necessitating people/community interaction.		
Classroom instruction, guidance and teacher/ student interaction that is not sensitive to gender differences and that favors boys over girls.	Lowers performance levels of female students. Limits curriculum choices of females. Leads to low self-esteem of female students. Causes pregnancy to become an escape mechanism. Channels females into training leading to lower-paid jobs.	Provide gender-free training for staff to change classroom instruction, guidance, and student/teacher interaction. Encourage females to enter nontraditional training areas, such as science, math, computer courses, managerial and technical trades, and professional career areas. Provide counseling to enhance girls' self esteem. Provide instruction that encourages group activities and collaboration that complements female cognitive development.		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
No alternative education plan for those who drop out of school.	Reduces number of students who return to school. Dropouts experience high unemployment and/or low entry level employment. Reduces participation in community activity. Contributes to criminal activity.	Follow up all school dropouts. Develop individual plans for students to complete a high school education by existing resources. Coordinate with business and industry and community agencies to provide an alternative school.		
Requiring all students to fulfill physical education requirements before graduation.	Causes students to fail physical education because they are embarrassed by the clothes they have to wear, are afraid to shower, can't afford proper dress or foot attire, or are embarrassed by showering together.	Provide alternative ways for students to complete physical education objectives, such as personal exercise programs, participation in community sponsored activities, etc. Provide proper physical education attire for students who can't afford it. Provide for private showering if needed, or eliminate requirement to shower. Provide clean, neat clothing for students who need it and will accept it. Allow a variety of attire for physical education to accommodate students.		
Reassigning teachers through reduction-in-force actions to positions in which they have little interest or motivation.	Negative attitudes of teachers conveyed to students. Causes teachers to do an inadequate job and students to lose interest.	Provide staff development to prepare teachers to function adequately.		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Grading system based on grade points and reports by letter grades only.	Discourages students because grades are not sensitive to or do not reflect student progress. Creates inconsistent demands on students. Reduces self-esteem. Reinforces feelings of alienation.	Provide for alternative grading practices, including checklists of competency attainment, and letters to parents identifying specific progress. Establish consistency between teachers in how grades are calculated.		
Prerequisite courses.	Discourages students from taking courses and trying new areas.	Establish prerequisites only where absolutely necessary. Allow exceptions to prerequisites where student backgrounds may suffice for prerequisites. Allow exploratory periods.		
Unlimited homework assignments. Applied practice and study exercises expected to be conducted as homework the majority of the time.	Causes slow-learning students to be overwhelmed by homework. Results in failing grades/ loss of credits. Prevents students from developing adequate study habits.	Establish class time for practice and study exercises. Provide after school, before school, and weekend supervised study areas. Implement a phase-in system, gradually increasing homework expectations from elementary through secondary. Allow reduced class loads, allowing students more time to keep up and do well.		

Discipline				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Discipline and punishment carried out by teachers and principals only.	Reduces students' responsibility for good behavior. Causes students to feel powerless and alienated.	Allow student input into designing rules and punishment for behavior. Allow student involvement in discipline and punishment. Meet with students throughout the school year to discuss rules, responsibility, and plans for change. Implement "quality of school life" programs.		
Teachers in departmentalized programs with their own rules for discipline.	Creates different expectations in each class, confusion, and mixed reactions.	Establish common rules that all staff can agree upon. Limit the number of rules to as few as possible to avoid over emphasis on rules and punishment.		
Counseling services limited to crisis situations. Counseling staff required to do administrative assignments, taking time away from direct interaction with students.	Limits students' access to counselors. Students recognize counselors as not being helpful. Reduces help when students need it.	Provide counselors with para-professional and secretarial help to encourage more time with students. Establish a counseling program involving all students. Establish counseling as a service across all staff. Lower counselor/student ratios. Target students for increased help.		

Discipline				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Corporal punishment applied liberally by administrators and/or teachers.	Establishes fear in students about attending school. Creates feelings of being abused or misused.	Establish clear guidelines on when corporal punishment can be used. Apply corporal punishment conservatively.		
Absence of clear, written communication on rules and discipline.	Creates misunderstanding about the consequences of behavior. Prevents students from filing a grievance and participating in due process.	Clearly communicate expected behavior and consequences of positive/negative behavior to students and parents. Reward proper, expected behavior. Establish grievance procedures. Establish written guidelines for students and parents on due process and rights and responsibilities. Incorporate model rules found in work places. Categorize rules by consequences/rewards. Example: Behavior disruptive to the learning environment yields severe consequences. Behavior not disruptive to the learning environment yields flexible problem solving.		

Support Services				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Tutorial and remedial assistance provided only through the elementary grades.	Failure in class work. Reduces achievement gains. Loneliness in having to face failure alone. Reduces feelings of success and belonging. Reinforces feelings to escape and drop out.	Continue tutorial and remedial assistance at the middle, junior high, and senior high level. Increase paraprofessional help within classrooms at the middle, junior high, and senior high school level. Establish learning centers that accommodate all students and that supplement study hall time by offering individual help. Create before- and after-school and weekend assistance, including transportation, if needed. Establish tutorial hot lines and peer assistance programs at the middle and high school levels.		
Fees for materials, tools, or equipment for classes.	Causes students to get behind in studies. Creates feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, low self-esteem. Contributes to criminal behavior.	Provide all basic needs, books, materials, tools, equipment, travel. Offer paid work experience in and out of school. Establish a fund to provide for students who do not pay.		

Support Services				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Attendance policy which allows out-of-school suspensions and/or expulsions. Students encouraged to drop out of school instead of offered options.	Gives students a reward for poor behavior. Has little correction effect. Excuses students from doing school work/ homework. Encourages students to stay away from school.	Contract with community organizations to promote attendance and offer personal attention to truant students. Positively encourage attendance by home visits, telephone calls, attendance team to monitor truants, individual contracts for improving behavior, intervention counseling. Recognize and reward good attendance. Follow due process if student expulsions are unavoidable. Provide in-school suspensions in which the education program continues. Place students in alternative settings to continue work, such as Saturday school, school within a school.		
Computerized scheduling with no personal contact between staff and students.	Causes personality conflicts. Causes adjustment problems in trying to meet expectations.	At minimum, allow all at-risk students to schedule classes through personal contact. Allow for a mix of different grade level students.		

Support Services				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Scheduling students to go from class to class without spending more than one class with the same group of students or the same teacher.	Offers little opportunity for consistent interaction with peers or same teacher. Causes students to believe they won't be missed and cut classes. Places students in classes with few or no friends.	Use flexible block scheduling, reducing fragmentation of school day.		
Special education placement without required pre-staffing with students and parents.	Causes students and parents to be overwhelmed and confused when involved in staffing, not knowing their options and rights. Lessens student and parent control in placement in and leaving programs.	Complete pre-staffings to inform parents and students of their rights and provide orientation to staffing. Coach parents and students on questions to ask.		
Pregnant students counseled out of regular school.	Diminishes student rights. Creates feelings of discrimination. Lowers self esteem. Limits education options.	Allow pregnant teens to remain in regular program if so desired and medically safe. Allow pregnant teens to make individual choices regarding regular vs. alternative schooling. Allow adjusted scheduling and/or modified school day. Provide separate programs for pregnant teens on a choice basis. Link day care services with school to allow teen parents to complete schooling.		

Support Services				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Little or no help for students involved in substance use and abuse.	Causes students to drop out of school to support a substance abuse habit. Results in sudden or prolonged failure from substance use/abuse behavior. Decreases feelings of self worth. Increases frustration in seeking and finding help. Lessens ability to identify advocates in the school who can help.	Provide assistance and referral services by student assistance teams and other means. Increase student and parent awareness to prevent and limit substance use. Develop formal plans with support and treatment services from outside the school. Allow adjustments in student programs to accommodate treatment and also ensure success in school.		

Attendance				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
A limit on the number of absences any student may have for illness, out-of-school suspensions, and travel.	Promotes truancy in students who know they have a certain number of days they can be absent. Ignores cultural, religious, and important family functions. Ignores health problems that students and parents cannot control.	Place no quotas on absences. Expect all students to attend the required days. Provide for religious, cultural, and family involvement activities, accepting parent requests for absences. Reward good attendance, including students who have acceptable absences. Assist parents and students immediately if an unexcused absence occurs and student performance is at risk. Establish a plan for how make-up work will get completed.		
Punishing student truancy by out-of-school suspension or lowered grades.	Pushes students out of school. Creates a feeling of not belonging. Establishes a posture that the opportunity to learn will be taken away rather than fostered. Indicates that learning will not be recognized if other behavior is unacceptable.	Provide assistance and referral services by student assistance teams and other means. Provide reasonable consequences for truancy violations. Provide opportunities to make up work by Saturday school, evening, or early bird programs. Assist students to get to school. Create incentive programs to encourage attendance. Reward academic achievement and behavior separately.		

Attendance				
Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
Runaways, shelter residents, and students living with a friend not accepted as students until records are transferred from another district and/or proof of residency can be established.	Lessens valuable learning time. Reinforces feelings of not belonging. Reduces self esteem. Reduces motivation to want to go to school.	Accept and serve students while seeking records, establishing guardianship, and establishing residency.		

Student Activities				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Student recognition programs that limit recognition criteria and exclude many students from recognition.	Establishes feelings of alienation. Discourages student's sense of commitment to school. Sets the stage for leaving school.	Establish recognition programs for personal/ social achievements and contributions or services to the school and community. Establish broad-based recognition programs that go beyond material rewards, such as pictures in the news, honorable mention by announcements in school and on radio, posted work, personal notes to parents/guardians, pats on the back, and special guests in community club functions.		
Dress code insensitive to social changes, cultural diversity, or religious backgrounds.	Establishes feelings of nonacceptance. Promotes peer pressure to not respect certain dress. Encourages students to challenge the system.	Allow any dress as long as it does not promote profanity or negatively affect the learning environment. Establish different dress days to reflect work place dress, cultural differences, etc.		
Limiting enrollment in extra-curricular activities. Participation fees and insensitive participation rules.	Reinforces a feeling in students that they are not good enough. Discourages students from wanting to enter extra-curricular activity. Embarrasses low-income students who are unable to pay. Decreases student participation.	Provide extra-curricular activities, encouraging maximum involvement of all students on a no-fee basis. Provide enough groups to accommodate all interested students. Coordinate with community agencies, parents, and business leaders to provide for constructive extra-curricular activity. Sensitize enrollment practices to cultural differences and personal needs.		

School and Community Relations

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
Absence of or limited formal plans linking school with community agencies.	Limits students knowledge of agencies and services outside of school that can help them. Limits students' access to outside outreach services. Causes community services and school services to clash, negatively affecting the student's progress. Limits teachers' knowledge of what services are available and how to use them to benefit students.	Develop a formal plan of how the school and agencies can work together. Develop alternatives for students to receive services and go to school and achieve success. Initiate continuous inservice programs involving collaboration between school and service agencies.		
Reduced parent involvement in school programs at the middle/ junior high and senior high levels.	Reduces effort at home to complement the teacher's work. Reduces family sense of involvement in and importance of education. Reduces sense of belonging by parent and student.	Involve parents at one or all of three possible levels, letting them know what is going on, asking them to contribute, and asking them to be involved continuously. Provide programs to help parents help their children learn. Provide student/parent team programs, allowing parents and students to learn together . Involve teachers in activities that link the school activities with parents.		
Failure to incorporate students' cultures into school routines.	Discourages minority students by not recognizing their importance or ability to contribute. Creates and reinforces a feeling of not belonging.	Incorporate cultural recognition into classes. Implement special activities to recognize the current life situations and contributions of different cultural groups.		

School and Community Relations				
Policies and/or Practices	**Negative Effects**	**Alternative**	**Local Analysis**	
			Problem Yes/No	**Objective**
Failure to establish role models within the teaching staff that reflect the cultural diversity of the community/student enrollment.	Reduces minority students' ability to form a sense of identity with positions of authority and decision making. Reduces majority students' ability to form a sense of identity with different cultural role models in positions of authority and decision making.	Adopt policies requiring that faculty and staff represent the racial makeup of the student body in every school. Hire para-professionals or incorporate volunteer assistants to supplement the staff to meet cross-cultural demands. Develop teams of teachers made up of different cultural backgrounds to teach, address student problems, counsel, coordinate community services, etc.		
Reporting to parents and guardians without notice to or involvement of the student.	Establishes distrust of adults. Violates privacy. Causes feelings of being watched. Causes feelings of not being responsible enough to be involved. Causes rejection and intimidation.	Inform students when parents are contacted. Involve students in communicating with parents/guardians. Let students assume responsibility to forward messages and design solutions to problems.		

This questionnaire can be used with students to help guide professional decisions regarding changes in policies and practices. Student responses can be ranked and utilized to prioritize policies and practices needing change.

Student Questionnaire

The school district is doing a study to determine what things school districts do to influence students to drop out rather than stay in school. Please place a check by all of the statements below that describe something that influenced your decision to drop out of school. Also place a check by any statement that describes something that caused you to not do well in school.

_____ 1. The school did not accept credits earned by correspondence.

_____ 2. I was retained one or more times before dropping out.

_____ 3. I had to be a full-time student with a full schedule.

_____ 4. The groups I studied with were considered low ability.

_____ 5. When I failed a grade I had to repeat everything rather than just the classes I failed.

_____ 6. Because of my pregnancy I was encouraged to leave.

_____ 7. Out-of-school suspensions and/or expulsions were a way to get out of work.

_____ 8. The way I dressed was not acceptable.

_____ 9. Teachers did not teach me the way I could learn.

_____ 10. The scheduling system did not allow me to choose my classes or teachers.

_____ 11. The number of required classes was increased to the point where I could not keep up with the work.

_____ 12. I had to take too many classes each day.

_____ 13. The school did not allow me to go part time and work part time.

_____ 14. Rewards were only given to students with good grades.

_____ 15. Teachers lectured most of the time.

_____ 16. Counselors and teachers did not help me feel that I belonged in school.

_____ 17. Teachers and counselors did not help me get started when I entered a new school.

_____ 18. My classes were short and switched so often I never had a chance to meet anyone and get to know them well.

_____ 19. Discipline and punishment rules were unfair to me.

_____ 20. Different teachers had different rules, which confused me.

_____ 21. Minority students were made to feel like they did not belong.

_____ 22. I needed a minority teacher/counselor to really understand my problems.

_____ 23. My parents did not help me to do well.

_____ 24. When I got help from a service outside of school it conflicted with my school schedule. I couldn't keep up all my classes and work on my problems at the same time.

_____ 25. My teachers did things that helped boys more than girls or girls more than boys.

_____ 26. Only a certain number of students were allowed to participate in clubs, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. I was never good enough.

_____ 27. I could not afford to pay fees for books, tools, and materials.

_____ 28. Counselors did not try to help me.

_____ 29. I needed more individual help to learn.

_____ 30. My drug and/or alcohol problem was not recognized or treated.

_____ 31. The punishment used by teachers and principals was scary.

_____ 32. The rules for punishment were not explained well and understood.

_____ 33. I missed school because I knew I could miss a certain number of days before anyone would do anything.

_____ 34. Suspension from school was a relief, so I did things to get suspended.

_____ 35. I was not accepted into school until my records were sent from another school and I missed too much work.

_____ 36. Physical education was embarrassing because of showering.

_____ 37. I could not afford the proper clothes for physical education.

_____ 38. Physical education activities were mostly things that I could not do well.

_____ 39. Most of my teachers did not care whether I did well.

_____ 40. I did not understand why I had to go to special education classes.

_____ 41. Although I tried to do the work, my grades were always low.

_____ 42. I did not take some courses because I had to take other courses to get in.

_____ 43. I could not keep up with homework assignments.

_____ 44. Reports were sent to my parents/guardians without me knowing about them.

_____ 45. Caring for my child was more important than going to school.

Feel free to add any additional ideas that you have about what caused you to not do well in school or to drop out.

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